



Afghan Army Graduates First Demining Class

Story by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Leslie Brown
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KABUL, Afghanistan— The Afghan National Army met another milestone recently when the first class of second-degree deminers graduated after completing a five-week advanced training course.

The graduation was an important step for the ANA since basic demining capabilities are desperately needed throughout Afghanistan, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. According to the United Nations Mine Action Program, despite ongoing demining operations, nearly 800 square kilometers of the country are still known to be mined.

All ANA personnel who work on demining teams attend the basic mining course, which lasts approximately two weeks. Those soldiers in leadership positions continue training for another five weeks to earn their second-degree deminer rating.

A second-degree deminer leads a four-soldier demining team and is also qualified to instruct the basic two-week training course.

The Coalition troops in charge of the course were from the French Army's Engineer Mobile Training Team. The EMTT is part of Operation Epidote, the name France has given to its entire training mission in Afghanistan.

French Army Capt. Thierry Sagon, primary instructor for the training, praised the students who completed the difficult coursework.

"They were all very interested and listened well," Sagon said of the newly trained deminers. "They were all superb students."

Taking part in the training were soldiers from the Engineer Company of the 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps' Combat Support Kandak (Battalion). ANA Lt. Col. Aminjan, the kandak commander, praised the French EMTT for their work as he addressed the graduation attendees. "We are thankful to the French teachers for training our soldiers," he said. "Our unit needs more training courses like this."

Aminjan continued by asking for further support



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

Afghan National Army Staff Sgt. Gehn Mohammed, a graduate of the ANA's five-week advanced demining course, prepares to neutralize a mine during a graduation ceremony demonstration.

from all members of the Coalition. "I want to ask our French trainers and Coalition forces to support us by providing modern demining equipment."

To demonstrate their newly acquired skills, the graduates conducted three demining scenarios for the crowd.

The first scenario demonstrated the proper method used to clear a mine during non-hostile operations. As the demining team leader used a sensor to detect an anti-tank mine, the team sprang into action to defuse the mine. To ensure no one on the team was injured,

the team leader placed a claw-like tool attached to a long rope onto the mine before he safely backed out of the area. After moving at least 50 meters away, he pulled the rope to move the mine, preventing his team from being caught by a booby trap.

The second demonstration displayed minefield breaching techniques used during hostile operations. After spotting a mine and moving their vehicle out of the danger area, the team leader organized a breaching team consisting of two sensor personnel, two probe-equipped observers, and a soldier in charge of tripwire detection. The team leader worked cautiously but expeditiously to neutralize the situation. Blasting the mine in place with a detonating assembly, the team leader then provided a situation report to his chief.

The final demonstration involved mine identification and neutralization. The new second-degree deminers successfully identified a number of different mines and then determined which neutralization technique was necessary to disable each specific type.



Photos by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

A six-man breaching team, consisting of a team leader, two sensor personnel, two probe-equipped observers and a soldier in charge of tripwire detection, demonstrates minefield breaching operations.

ANA Pvt. Mohammad Din, a student and member of the Engineer Company, spoke highly of the class. “Outstanding training, all of it the best!”

The other students shared his enthusiasm. Upon receiving their training certificates, they held them high in the air for everyone to see while the French trainers gave a loud “bravo” in response.

Afghanistan has a long way to go before it will be completely free of the dangers of landmines, but with

training courses such as this, the country is further on its way to accomplishing that goal.

Before the ceremony was finished, Sagon reminded the graduates of the importance of their new training and how risky the job of demining really is. Stressing the dangers that are ever present in mine clearing operations, he made it clear that a deminer’s “first mistake is the last mistake.”



An ANA demining team leader prepares to move a mine with a claw-like tool to ensure it’s not rigged with a booby trap. The claw, attached to a long rope, will be pulled from a safe distance of at least 50 meters.



A graduate of the French-taught advanced demining course demonstrates the use of a mine-detecting sensor to locate buried landmines.